

Air Medical Services in Virginia: An Overview



Virginia Department of Health
Office of Emergency Medical Services

The Dawn of Air Medical Services in Virginia

- LifeGuard 10, the first licensed Air Medical Service based in Virginia was located in Salem and began operations in 1981.
- The 1981 General Assembly directed the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of State Police to establish a statewide air medical system.



JLARC Report

Item 16I of the 1998 Appropriation Act directed a report of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to perform a study which:

“shall include, but not be limited to, the availability of air medical evacuation services, administrative protocols of service providers, the need for statewide alternatives and options, and the mission, operations, coordination, and funding of public and private air medevac programs.”

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JLARC Report

At the time of the JLARC report, there were seven medevac services in Virginia that were licensed to operate by the Virginia Office of EMS (OEMS), with the Virginia State Police having established locations in Chesterfield and in Abingdon. In addition, there were five agencies based outside of Virginia providing service to areas within the borders of the Commonwealth, with two of those agencies (US Park Police and MedStar) based out of the Washington, DC area.

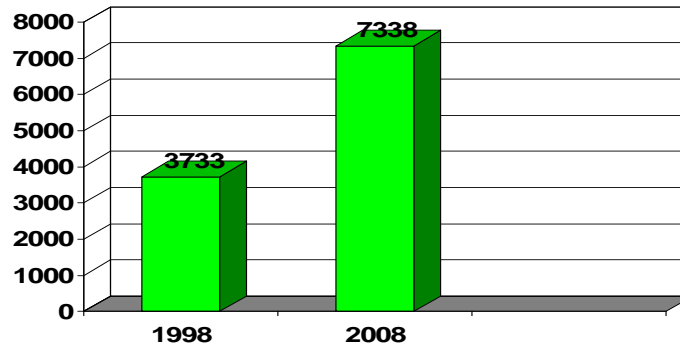
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Air Medical Service Operators - 2008

Air Medical Services Call Volume

- At the time of the JLARC report, it was reported that more than 3,700 air medical missions were flown in Virginia in 1998. In 2008, more than 7,300 air medical missions were flown in Virginia. The three VSP Med Flight bases flew nearly 1,400 missions in 2008.



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Air Medical Service – Public and Commercial

The Virginia State Police and the Fairfax County Police Department are the only public service agencies in Virginia that provide medevac service, with the US Park Police and Maryland State Police representing public service agencies based outside of Virginia and providing service to Virginia.

Currently, the Virginia Beach Police Department is in the process of certification of their helicopter as an air ambulance. The remainder of the state is covered by commercial entities, five of which are based outside of Virginia.

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Air Medical Services – Financial Impact

Nationally, air medical transports are approximated to cost a patient over \$10,000. These costs may not be covered by the patients own medical insurance, either in full or in part. Additionally, OEMS does not have the authority to regulate fees for air medical service.

Since 1984, OEMS has transferred funds to the Department of State Police to supplement Med Flight operations, and as the Virginia General Assembly has approved increases in the “For Life” funding, funds earmarked to VSP for Med Flight has also increased. Currently, the Department of State Police receives \$1.6 million from OEMS specifically for Med-Flight operations. No other air medical services operator in Virginia receives direct operating funds from OEMS.

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Air Medical Services – Regulation

OEMS is the agent that grants the authority for an air medical service to provide medical service in Virginia, as well as inspects the equipment used to provide care, the certifications and training records of providers, and EMS training and performance improvement records of the agency.

OEMS does not have the authority to inspect the mechanical capability of an air ambulance (rotor wing or fixed wing), nor the authority to inspect the licenses of pilots or flight mechanics.

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Air Medical Services – Regulation

OEMS does not currently have the authority to regulate where Air Medical Service is to be provided.

An air medical service can apply for licensure in any service area of their choosing, as long as they have the approval of the jurisdiction(s) where their base of operation is located. This governmental approval process is often completed without question by local governmental officials.

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Air Medical Services – State Medevac Committee

Representatives of the air medical service stakeholders in Virginia participate in the regular meetings of the State Medevac Committee, a subcommittee of the state EMS Advisory Board.

The committee meets quarterly, and is charged with providing expert guidance to OEMS and the state EMS Advisory Board regarding appropriate standards and recommendations to promote safe, high quality Medevac system for Virginia.

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Air Medical Services – Collaboration & Strategic Planning

Over the past year, the medevac stakeholders in Virginia have participated in strategic planning sessions to clarify the role and expectations of the Committee and to develop consensus on the desired Medevac system for the Commonwealth.

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Air Medical Services – Collaboration & Strategic Planning

The planning sessions culminated in the development of a Medevac Strategic Plan, including a mission, vision, action strategies, and implementation steps. The sessions also identified four work groups, made up of various medevac stakeholders, tasked with addressing each of the four action strategies that were agreed upon.

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Air Medical Services – Collaboration & Strategic Planning

The four groups:

- **Communications**
- **Regulation**
- **Safety**
- **Resource Utilization**

Have already begun making many improvements to the medevac system, with the collective intention of striving for the safest, most progressive, and most appropriately utilized air medical system in the country.

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Additional Information

Additional information related to the Medevac System in Virginia, including local, state, federal, and industry produced guidance documents can be found on the OEMS website, at the link below:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/OEMS/Medevac/Index.htm>

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